



H1N1 (Swine Flu) – Frequently Asked Questions

Updated 8/7/09

Current Status

Are there H1N1 (swine flu) cases in Washington?

Yes, there are confirmed cases in Washington State. Updated case counts are posted on the Department of Health Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu.

Where else are there H1N1 (swine flu) cases?

There have been confirmed cases in all states in the United States, as well as in other countries. For current information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm

How serious is this outbreak?

Most countries have confirmed cases of H1N1 (swine flu). The United States continues to report the largest number of H1N1 cases of any country worldwide; however, most people who have become ill have recovered without requiring medical treatment. This flu is less severe than the seasonal flu that occurs every year in the U.S. Seasonal flu puts 200,000 people in the hospital and causes hundreds of thousands of illnesses. It does appear that the new virus is spread as easily as seasonal influenza.

New cases of H1N1 are reported every week in our state, and we are now preparing for a possible stronger wave of infections during the fall/winter flu season.

What is WHO pandemic alert Phase 6? Phase 6 is the World Health Organization's highest alert level. It indicates that the sustained flu outbreaks are occurring in several regions and that a pandemic is underway. The alert level is based on the amount of flu being reported worldwide, not on the seriousness of the infections.

What is the government doing to protect us?

- Local health departments are working closely with health care providers to investigate cases of influenza-like illness to see if they are due to this new virus.
- Our state laboratory is testing samples for swine flu.
- Our state has access to enough antiviral medication to treat up to 25 percent of our state population.

Vaccine

What's the status of the H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine? Will it be available soon?

Vaccines are a very important part of a response to H1N1 and the U.S. government is aggressively taking early steps to promote manufacturing of a H1N1 vaccine. We expect delivery of the vaccine in the fall.

Will H1N1 (swine flu) vaccinations be mandatory?

No; no vaccine is mandatory. Once the vaccine is developed and tested, we will encourage people to get it but it will not be mandatory.

H1N1 (Swine Flu) Basics

What is swine flu?

In general, swine flu is a respiratory disease in pigs caused by a type A influenza virus. Viruses that cause swine flu do not normally infect humans, although rare human infections have occurred. The swine flu virus we are now concerned with originally came from pigs but combined with other types of viruses to make a new virus that can now be transmitted from person to person.

How sick do people get?

Many people who get swine flu have the same type of symptoms as seasonal flu and recover fully. Just like seasonal flu, however, swine flu can lead to pneumonia, and in some cases, death.

What are the symptoms of swine flu?

Symptoms are similar to those for seasonal influenza. Those symptoms include fever over 100° F, cough, sore throat, body aches and headache. In addition, fatigue, lack of appetite, runny nose, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can occur.

If you have symptoms of influenza such as fever, cough and sore throat, and are at risk for severe illness (children under two years old; pregnant women; adults over 65 years old; residents of long-term care facilities; people with chronic lung, heart, kidney or liver disease; diabetes; sickle cell anemia; immunosuppression or receiving chemotherapy for cancer), you should contact your health care provider.

Anyone with fever and severe respiratory symptoms such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing should contact their health care provider.

Will this be like the 1918 pandemic and come back stronger in the fall?

The huge 1918 influenza pandemic resulted in many severe cases and deaths. It's possible this new virus could cause another large pandemic, but we don't know at this point. One of the differences between 2009 and 1918 is that we have more resources available. For example, the federal government is working on a vaccine to treat this flu. In addition to much better health care in hospitals, antiviral medications are available that are effective

in treating this flu. We also have better disease surveillance in place to help us monitor this outbreak.

How Do People Get Swine Flu?

How do people get swine flu?

You can become infected by the swine flu virus when someone infected with swine flu coughs or sneezes droplets near you and you take in the virus through your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also get the virus by touching a surface such as a countertop or doorknob that has become contaminated and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

Can I get swine flu from eating pork, ham, etc.?

No, you cannot get swine flu in that way. Swine flu is passed from person to person through coughing or sneezing, or by touching a surface that an infected person has coughed or sneezed on and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

How long can the virus live on a countertop or other surface?

The virus can live on hard surfaces for at least several hours and possibly more than a day. For that reason, it is important that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing to avoid passing on the virus.

- For information on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, see www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu - available in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, large type

How long are people contagious?

Infected people can infect others beginning one day before symptoms start and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

How long can you be infected before getting sick (showing symptoms)?

Not all infected people get sick but, if an infected person develops symptoms, it usually happens 1-7 days after infection.

Prevention and Treatment

How do I avoid getting swine flu or infecting others if I have the flu?

These things are very simple, but they really work:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and clean your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people; don't share glasses or eating utensils.
- Wash a sick person's laundry in hot water and dry it on high. Wear gloves or wash your hands after touching laundry.
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

Is there a vaccine that can protect me from H1N1 (swine flu)?

- No. There is no vaccine that can protect us against swine flu at this time.
 - The federal government is working on an H1N1 vaccine. It is expected to be available in the fall.
- If you are at risk for severe influenza, ask your health care provider about pneumococcal vaccine to prevent the complications of flu.

Is there medication that can treat H1N1 (swine flu)?

- We believe that antiviral medications can reduce the severity of symptoms.
- The commercial names of the antivirals are Tamiflu (a pill) and Relenza (a nasal spray).
- Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are ill AND are at high risk of complications.

Will this year's seasonal vaccine protect me from H1N1 (swine flu)?

No, this year's seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you from swine flu.

Should I get vaccinated against seasonal flu anyway?

Again, seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you from swine flu. Our normal flu season is almost over, but there may still be some benefit to getting the seasonal vaccine.

Can I use antivirals like Tamiflu and Relenza to avoid getting the swine flu?

Tamiflu and Relenza are for treatment, not prevention:

- We are not sure these drugs can prevent someone from getting the virus.
- If large numbers of people were to take these drugs for prevention, the virus may develop resistance to them and they could no longer be used to treat sick people.
- This disease outbreak could last a long time. If you took these drugs to try to avoid getting sick, you would have to take them possibly for many months.
- Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are ill or to prevent illness in high-risk situations.

Where can I get Tamiflu and Relenza?

Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are ill.

Does the government have antivirals?

Federal, state and local governments have supplies of antiviral drugs that they will use to resupply hospitals, doctors' offices and pharmacies to avoid any shortages.

What if I'm Sick?

What should I do if I get sick?

Although typical flu symptoms usually do not require medical attention, healthy adults who are not at risk for complications of flu should at least contact their doctor if they have unexplained fever and trouble breathing or if their symptoms are getting worse. If people are at risk for severe influenza (see above), they should at least contact their doctor when they develop symptoms of the flu, including fever and either a cough or sore throat.

If you become very ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, sore throat, vomiting or diarrhea, call your health care provider.

- NOTE – Unless you need urgent medical care, please phone rather than going directly to a doctor's office, clinic or hospital. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from infecting others.

Seek urgent medical care if...

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Strategic National Stockpile

What is the SNS (Strategic National Stockpile)?

CDC's Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) is a large national repository of life-saving pharmaceuticals and medical supplies to protect the American public if there is a public health emergency (terrorist attack, pandemic influenza outbreak, earthquake) severe enough to cause local supplies to run out.

- In the case of antivirals, every state has been allotted a preset amount. Each state has now received 25 percent of its allotment.
- In our state, we distribute our SNS antivirals to local health departments based on population.
- Local governments will use SNS supplies only to re-supply pharmacies, doctors' offices and hospitals if they run out of their current supply.

Will there be enough antivirals for everyone?

The CDC recommends that states have access to enough antiviral medications to treat twenty-five percent of their population. Our allotment from the SNS along with supplies purchased by our state and several counties gives us enough medication to meet that recommendation. Again, antivirals should only be used to treat people who are sick.

Travel

How could H1N1 (swine flu) affect my travel plans?

You could be screened for H1N1.--Many countries, including Japan and China, are screening arriving passengers to reduce the spread of H1N1. Travelers coming from the United States may be checked for fever and other symptoms of H1N1, and their travel may be delayed.

If you are sick with symptoms of influenza-like illness, you should not travel. --

These symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. many people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting.

Healthy people may make travel plans using only common sense precautions to protect their health during travel.

If you are at risk of complications from H1N1 (swine flu) and traveling to a country experiencing an H1N1 outbreak, check with your doctor before traveling. --

Travelers at high risk for complications include:

- Children less than 5 years of age
- Those who are 65 years old or older
- Children and adolescents (less than 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection
- Pregnant women
- Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, hepatic, hematological, neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders
- Adults and children who have immunosuppression (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by HIV)

People in the above groups should discuss their travel plans with their doctor. Together, they should consider the H1N1 situation in their destination and the available health-care options in the area. They should discuss their specific health situations and possible increased risk of traveling to the area affected by H1N1.

Schools

How do I know when I should keep my child home from school or daycare?

Does your child have a fever (100° F or 37. 7°C)? If you don't have a thermometer, feel your child's skin with your hand. If it is much warmer than usual your child probably has a fever.

Does your child have a sore throat, cough, body aches, vomiting, or diarrhea?

If you answered "yes" to both questions, your child might have the flu. Keep your child home from school for 7 days or until symptoms are gone for 24 hours, whichever is longer.

If you answered "yes" to only one of the questions, keep your child home from school until symptoms are gone for 24 hours.

Masks

Should I buy masks? Should I wear a mask?

Wearing a mask does not guarantee that you will be protected from the swine flu virus. You will be much better protected if you wash your hands frequently and avoid sick people. In areas with confirmed cases of swine flu, if you are at risk for severe flu, avoid crowds and stay at least six feet from those who are coughing and sneezing.

Wearing a mask when you are ill and coughing can reduce your ability to give the infection to someone else.

What kind of mask works best?

Masks are usually disposable, certified by the FDA and labeled as surgical, dental, medical procedure, isolation or laser masks. If properly used, they should stop influenza transmission due to the droplets resulting from an infectious sneeze or cough.

Wear a **mask** when close contact with an infectious person is unavoidable—for example, if you must care for a sick person such as a family member with a respiratory infection.

In some settings, nurses, doctors and other health care providers wear a **respirator** when there is a risk that virus is present in the air (aerosol). This usually only occurs when a sick person with a respiratory infection is being suctioned or given nebulizer treatments. Respirators are not necessary for the general public; however, if you are suctioning or

giving nebulizer treatments to someone with flu at home, you should consider wearing a respirator.

A respirator should be labeled N95 or higher by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Make sure that your face mask or respirator fits snugly on your face. Be sure to dispose of used masks or respirators and wash your hands after touching or taking off your mask.

Cleaning and Disinfecting

Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces:

- Keep hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Keep surfaces touched by more than one person clean and disinfected. Examples of these surfaces include doorknobs, refrigerator door handles and microwaves.
- Use disposable sanitizer cloths or disinfectant on a towel to wipe electronic items that are touched often, such as phones, computers, remote controls and hand-held games.

When surfaces are not visibly dirty

- Clean the surface with a commercial product that is both a detergent (cleans) and a disinfectant (kills germs). These products can be used when surfaces are not visibly dirty.

When surfaces are visibly dirty

- Wash the surface with a general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water and follow with a disinfectant. This method should be used for visibly dirty surfaces.

More cleaning information: www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu

Other Questions

Can my pet get swine flu?

Currently, there is not enough information to fully assess the health implications of this novel strain of flu virus for animals. There is no evidence at this time that swine in the United States are infected with this flu virus strain.

- It is very unlikely that dogs, cats or horses would become infected with this virus.
- It may be possible for a pet monkey (nonhuman primate) and for pet swine and ferrets to become infected with this new virus from a human. For more information on how to protect your pet swine, please visit the following Web sites:

More information:

U.S. Department of Agriculture www.usda.gov

The National Pork Board Web site also provides related information for pork producers or commercial swine owners: www.pork.org

Is it OK to eat fruits and vegetables from Mexico?

Yes, it is OK to eat them. The virus will not survive on produce for the time it takes to ship it here. Always wash fruit and vegetables before eating.

Can I get swine flu from drinking water?

No, you can't catch the virus from drinking properly disinfected tap water, even if the water was originally drawn from a source that had been in contact with infected people or animals. Since groundwater sources are not exposed to the virus, water from wells or springs, even if not disinfected, would not directly lead to an infection.

However, drinking water cups or glasses used by people who have been diagnosed as having, or show symptoms of, the flu **should not be used by others.**